



Friday, August 24, 2007

MANAGEMENT

Nell Kuhnmuench

Michael D. Hawks

Stephen E. Young

Kirk A. Profit

Kenneth Cole

Donald Van Singel

Brett Henderson

William Zaagman

Erik Hingst

Patrick Laughlin

Gary M. Owen

Vagnozzi, Always A Democrat

By Jack Spencer, senior analyst for *MIRS*

**“Weekly
Centerpiece”**

A Hubert Humphrey Democrat in a post-Bill Clinton world, Rep. Aldo Vagnozzi (D-Farmington Hills) will be celebrating his 82nd birthday Oct. 4. He jokes that the only term limit he’s concerned about has nothing to do with Michigan election laws.

“At my age I’m growing older faster than anyone else around here,” he quips. “My legislative term limit isn’t the term limit I worry about.”

While to many of his colleagues the early years of the John Engler administration are almost ancient history, Vagnozzi can converse about Henry Wallace and Harry Truman. That was the politics of the late 1940s, when Vagnozzi was writing for the Wayne State University *Daily Collegian*.

Vagnozzi worked on the campaigns of Truman, John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson. He was a delegate at the 1960 and 1968 Democratic conventions, and as a Humphrey delegate in 1968, Vagnozzi drove Humphrey around the state. That same year, Vagnozzi participated in an anti-Vietnam War rally in Washington. And this all took place decades before Vagnozzi became mayor of Farmington Hills in the 1990s and was first elected to the House in 2002.

A former editor of *Detroit Labor News* and *AFL-CIO News*, Vagnozzi remains the classic “little d” or “let’s debate” Democrat. He fights for those he considers to be the “little guys,” and honors fair play – even for those folks across the aisle.

More than once during the past two terms, when the Republicans pulled procedural maneuvers on the House floor, slipping around rules with the power of the gavel, the Democrats cried foul, and cried it loudly. But Vagnozzi took a different approach, bringing the Democratic case to the press table.

“Did you see that?” he would ask in a soft, but not necessarily calm, voice.

A Service of GCSI ... Voted Michigan’s #1 Lobby Firm

Then he was reminded that today's news media doesn't bother covering the process anymore. Besides, the Democrats pulled the same stuff back when they were in control.

"But we won't do that if we get control again – at least I hope we don't," he'd respond. "I really mean that." And it turns out that he did.

This term, with the Democrats in control of the House, a procedural trick or two has already breezed by the board.

"I wish we wouldn't do that," he says, staying consistent with his argument of the previous terms. "I know that's the way it's always been done, but everyone in here represents the people of their district."

Mention the Republican plan to bring teacher benefits in line with those of the private sector, and Vagnozzi recoils. "You know, teachers in Michigan spend a lot of money on school supplies for their classes," he'll tell you. "I mean a lot of their own money. I think they deserve to have decent health care."

Vagnozzi's HCR 22 is a promise that the legislature will develop a health care system that provides comprehensive coverage to all residents. It probably won't go anywhere in the Senate, but at least Vagnozzi got his point-of-view on the record.

On tackling the state budget, Vagnozzi seems a bit dismayed that his colleagues can't seem to just take care of business. In fact, Vagnozzi often expresses a bit of impatience with the whole legislative process.

"We're at ease at the call of chair, haven't we been at ease for months?" he commented a year or two ago.

"The Speaker didn't like me saying that," he chuckled a few days later.

WEEKLY REHASH

Budgets, Budgets and Well . . .

The lead up to this week in the halls of the Capitol building was intense.

"They're going to have three heavy legislative days," was the common assertion among staffers, lobbyists and watchers of the state's 148 lawmakers. In the end, though, it was more like one lite day and one day and a half for the House that seemed to get tangled up in its own procedures taking it from 1 p.m. Wednesday to 7 a.m. Thursday to pass legislation that normally could have been done in a regular work day.

What bogged the House down early Thursday morning (midnight early) was an attempt to come up with substitutes to the Higher Education and Community College bills that could be used to block Republican attempts to strip language permitting the institutions to pay for same-sex health care benefits — a key objective of a Democratic benefactor named Jon Stryker.

Turns out the Democrats spoiled the substitutes and wound up going into numerous caucus meetings throughout the night to get their strategy in sync. In the end, they did move the bills through without forcing their moderate members to vote on an amendment that would strip the benefits out — but it took all night.

To their credit, though, the House and Senate did begin the process of putting into place budget bills so when Gov. Jennifer Granholm, Speaker Andy Dillon (D-Redford) and Senate Majority Leader Mike Bishop (R-Rochester) do reach a deal, they'll have bills in place that are vehicles ready for implementing whatever is agreed to.

After this week, the Legislature is procedurally, at least, a lot closer to getting the state a Fiscal Year 2008 budget.

Presidential Primary

The Senate passed legislation setting the presidential primary for Jan. 15, which would make Michigan one of the first in the country to state its preference for the major party presidential candidates. Democrats though are still holding out with Party Chair Mark Brewer stating he's anxious this weekend to get national approval for state rules to hold a closed caucus.

K-12 Spending

House Democrats approved a school aid budget that would increase per pupil funding by \$100. In total, the bill would spend an additional \$301 million on education next year. The GOP howled that the bill spends \$495 million more than the state is expected to take in.

WEEKLY FORECAST

Talk is that the House Speaker and Senate Majority Leader are nearing a deal at closing the state's \$1.8 billion, Fiscal Year 2008 budget deficit. Such a deal could allow lawmakers and Gov. Jennifer Granholm to duck a black eye by avoiding either a government shutdown or continuing budget resolutions — either of which would be another bruise for an already battered state government reputation.

Michigan Factoid:

Michigan's unemployment rate led the nation for the past two months.

Look for a deal that could, underline could, include:

- Increased cigarette taxes
- Increased liquor taxes, or liquor license fees
- Some sort of deal involving racinos — some are suggesting allowing racinos (think slots at horse race tracks) would allow lawmakers to adopt a temporary income tax increase and allow voters to roll that tax hike back by approving racinos
- Lots of talk about user fees

A Service of GCSI ... Voted Michigan's #1 Lobby Firm

Disclaimer

This newsletter is a client service provided by GCSI. The news and views contained in this newsletter are based on the research and reporting of Michigan Information & Research Service, Inc (MIRS, www.mirsnews.com) and do not necessarily represent the views, opinions or strategic advice of GCSI. This newsletter is presented to you as one more resource for inside information and insights into state government happenings. For specific questions about politics, personalities, legislation, policy and strategies please always contact your GCSI lobbyist.